

TWO-LETTER WORDS

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In the November 1972 Word Ways, we presented an article entitled "One-Letter Words" which demonstrated that every letter of the alphabet could be used as a word or name. Unfortunately, no similar study has ever been made for two-letter words, the simplest group of words after the single-letter ones. Such a study would prove invaluable to Scrabble-players, crossword-puzzlers and other word enthusiasts, who often find it necessary to use words of this type.

How many two-letter words exist? Two letters are likely to form a word if they are pronounceable -- that is, if they contain at least one of the vowels A, E, I, O, U or Y -- and unlikely to form a word if they are not. Using C to denote a consonant and V a vowel, there are 120 combinations of the form CV, another 120 of the form VC, and 36 of the form VV. Thus, we calculate that there must be approximately 276 two-letter words.

How many of these 276 pronounceable combinations can be validated as real words or names? Scanning a number of major reference works in our personal library, we managed to verify that 247 of the 276 combinations actually exist. These words and names, accompanied by brief definitions, are listed in the table on the following pages. The sources from which these words were extracted are given by numbers in parenthesis, keyed to a full list at the end of the article. Occasionally, the words are not separately listed at their alphabetical position in the source; the word following the reference number indicates where these can be found. The presence of a + sign in front of a word's definition should be interpreted as meaning "an obsolete spelling of".

There are a total of 29 blanks in the table. Perhaps readers can identify one or more of these as actually existing.

Note that we have excluded all two-letter combinations that are labeled as abbreviations only; for example, EQ is given in Webster's Third as an abbreviation of "educational quotient".

We have blatantly ignored the 400 additional combinations of the form CC, where C is a consonant. Probably only a small percentage of the 400 are real words or names. We would hazard a guess that no more than 20 per cent are dictionary-listed. Even though we did ignore these words, perhaps some other reader might like to investigate them and present his or her findings to the editor.

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

- aa type of lava (3)
 Ab Jewish month (3)
 ac but (2)
 ad advertisement (3)
 ae one (3)
 af + off (1)
 ag relating to agriculture (3)
 ah interjection (3)
 ai type of sloth (3)
 aj adze (12)
 ak East Indian shrub (2)
 al Indian mulberry (3)
 am part of verb to be (3)
 an indefinite article (3)
 Ao tribe of India (2)
 Ap form of deity (7)
 Aq river in Iran (13)
 ar the letter R (3)
 as bronze coin (3)
 at preposition (3)
 au + owe (1)
 Av Jewish month (3)
 aw interjection (3)
 ax cutting tool (3)
 ay yes (3)
 az yes (11)
- ba bleat (3)
 be exist (3)
 bi + buy (1)
 bo fellow (3)
 bu Japanese coin (3)
 by near (3)
- ca call (1)
 ce the letter C (3)
 ci from the phrase ci git (16)
 co cove (2)
 cu + cow (1)
 Cy pet form of Cyrus (9)
- da fiber plant (3)
 de the letter D (3)
 di gods (2)
 do perform (3)
 du variant of do (3)
 dy type of sediment (6)
- ea stream (3)
 eb reformed spelling of ebb (2)
- ec + eke (1)
 Ed Biblical name (2)
 ee eye (3)
 ef the letter F (3)
 eg reformed spelling of egg (2)
 eh interjection (3)
 ei + any (1)
 ej
 ek form of eke (5/eke)
 el elevated railroad (3)
 em the letter M (3)
 en the letter N (3)
 eo + you (5/you)
 Ep town in Kentucky (14)
 eq
 er interjection (3)
 es the letter S (3)
 et dialect past of eat (3)
 eu + yew (2)
 ev have (17)
 ew + ewe (2)
 ex the letter X (3)
 ey + egg (2)
 ez I (10/I)
- fa musical tone (3)
 fe syllable of bebization (2)
 fi sol-fa syllable (2)
 Fo the Buddha (2)
 fu administrative division (2)
 fy interjection (9)
- Ga people of Ghana (3)
 Ge people of Brazil (3)
 Gi people of Africa (3)
 go move (3)
 gu violin (9)
 gy guide (1)
- ha interjection (3)
 he pronoun (3)
 hi interjection (3)
 Ho people of India (3)
 Hu people of China (3)
 hy + high (2)
- ia + yea (5/yea)
 Ib form of Isabella (9)
 ic + I (1)
 id skin rash (3)
 ie mat (3)

- if supposing (3)
 ig + I (1)
 ih + I (1)
 Il river in Finland (13)
 Ij part of the Zuider Zee (8)
 Ik diminutive of Isaac (2)
 il reformed spelling of ill (2)
 im + him (5)
 in during (3)
 io hawk (3)
 Ip a surname (20)
 IQ intelligence quotient (3)
 Ir Biblical name (2)
 is part of verb to be (3)
 it pronoun (3)
 Iu + Jew (5/Jew)
 iv corrupt form of in (1)
 iw + yew (1)
 ix axle-tree (17)
 iy
 iz us (10)

 ja yes (2)
 je + yea (5/yea)
 Ji a surname (21)
 jo coffee (3)
 Ju porcelain (2)
 j'y from j'y suis, j'y reste (2)

 ka personality double (3)
 ke + kae (1)
 ki tree (3)
 Ko Chinese porcelain (3)
 ku the letter Q (3)
 ky plural of cow (1)

 la note (3)
 le sol-fa syllable (2)
 li Chinese unit of measure (3)
 Lo North American Indian (3)
 Lu ethnic group of China (3)
 ly measure of Amman (2)

 ma mother (3)
 me pronoun (3)
 mi note (3)
 mo moment (3)
 mu Greek letter (3)
 my belonging to me (3)

 na no (3)

 ne not (3)
 ni syllable of bobization (2)
 no denial (3)
 nu Greek letter (3)
 ny nor I (2)

 Oa place in Caroline Islands (13)
 ob objection (2)
 oc yes (2)
 od force (3)
 oe whirlwind (3)
 of about (3)
 Og Biblical name (2)
 oh zero (3)
 oi oy (8)
 oj
 ok + ached (2)
 ol + whole (5)
 om mantra (3)
 on preposition (3)
 oo bird (3)
 op optical art (4)
 oq
 or golden (3)
 os bone (3)
 ot that (10)
 ou variant of oh (3)
 ov heave (10)
 ow interjection (3)
 ox animal (3)
 oy grandchild (3)
 oz ration of narcotics (18)

 pa village (3)
 pe Hebrew letter (3)
 pi Greek letter (3)
 po imptsh spirit (2)
 pu pull (3)
 py + pie (2)

 qa
 qe
 qi
 qo
 qu + cue (2)
 qy

 ra + raw (2)
 re concerning (3)
 ri Japanese unit of measure (3)
 Ro artificial language (3)

- ru + rough (2)
 ry + rye (1)

 sa variant of so (3)
 se Japanese unit of measure (2)
 si tone (3)
 so therefore (3)
 Su solar deity (2)
 sy scythe (3)

 ta thanks (3)
 te the letter T (3)
 ti tree (3)
 to until (3)
 tu variant of thou (2)
 Ty Norse war-god (2)

 ua + woe (5/woe)
 Ub place in Africa (14)
 uc
 ud dialect variant of had (1)
 ue
 uf
 ug feeling of disgust (2)
 uh interjection (5)
 ui isthmus (10)
 Uj river in Persia (14)
 Uk place in Russia (13)
 ul vapour (10)
 um interjection (3)
 un one (3)
 uo + foe (5)
 up in a higher position (3)
 uq
 ur dialect variant of our (3)
 us pronoun (3)
 ut tone (3)
 tu
 uv of (10/of)
 uw
 ux phone operator code word (19)
 Uy river in USSR (14)
 Uz home of Job (2)

 va musical direction (2)
 ve the letter V (3)
 vi tree (3)
 vo + foe (1)
 Vu people of Burma (2)
 vy + vie (5)

 Wa people of Burma (3)
 we pronoun (3)
 wi + why (1)
 wo + woe (3)
 Wu dialect group (3)
 wy the letter Y (3)

 xa + shah (2)
 xe
 xi Greek letter (3)
 xo
 xu Vietnamese coin (4)
 xy

 ya interjection (3)
 yb
 yc
 yd + it (5)
 ye you (3)
 yf + give (1)
 yg
 yh
 Yi river in Uruguay (13)
 yj
 yk + I (1)
 yl + ill (1)
 ym contraction of them (2)
 yn contraction of then (2)
 yo interjection (3)
 yp
 yq
 yr their (2)
 ys + ice (2)
 yt contraction of that (2)
 yu jade (2)
 yv
 yw + you (5)
 yx
 YY pen name of Robert Lynd (15)
 yz

 za B-flat (2)
 ze + sea (1)
 zi + see (1)
 zo Asian cattle (2)
 Zu storm god (2)
 zy + she (1)

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